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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an approach to setting and evaluating experiential objectives for instruction in interpersonal communication. The first step suggested is to establish a set of experiential goals most likely to evoke personally meaningful student learning. Sample goals include: (1) the use of observation to identify and report on behaviors of other students, communication behaviors of people on the job, and communication behaviors of people in situations comparable to those in which they would like to improve; (2) creatively writing a short story, play, or poem, and/or doing a drawing; and (3) teaching someone about interpersonal communication by interviewing another student and tutoring him to meet his needs, and/or creating a game or exercise to help another learn a skill in communication. The procedure for evaluating students' work involves commenting on how well the experience was used for learning, and the procedure for grading should be based on how much effort was made to undertake potentially worthwhile experiences. It is suggested that the instructor can best accomplish this by deciding on a minimum set of experiences that will most likely cover the basic essentials of the course. (WR)

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OBJECTIVES, EVALUATION, AND GRADING IN INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION COURSES: AN EXPERIENTIAL PERSPECTIVE

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I

Too often innovations in education are used as solutions for problems to which they are not suited. Most recently behavioral objectives and quantitative rating systems have been advocated for improving instruction in speech.[1] Although originated in other disciplines, these procedures are considered directly applicable to the teaching of interpersonal communication. Such proposals, however, ignore characteristics inherent to this field of study that have clear implications for how it should be taught.

A student might enter a class in history completely ignorant of the events which occurred in the historical period to be studied. Consequently, what he gains from that course can and perhaps should be comparable to what all his classmates learn. In contrast, a student enters a class in interpersonal communication with a lifetime of related experiences and many deeply embedded attitudes about his participation in that process. In fact, each student has a unique life history. No two people grow up under identical conditions. Every individual has contacted his own network of significant others who have shaped his thinking and behavior when relating to others.

In addition, at the moment he is taking that class, each student has his own specific relationships to which he would like to apply what he is learning. Students in a history class, on the other hand, to apply what they have learned, can pick up the same newspaper and relate the past they have explored to present political events which affect them all almost uniformly. Each student in the interpersonal communication class is in a unique position vis-a-vis his family, friends, and others with whom he relates. His transfer of learning must be adapted to his particular situation.

Similarly, the careers students anticipate can have distinct communication needs. Doctors, lawyers, and Indian chiefs all need to know basic math. But, when communicating, doctors have a greater need to be therapeutic, lawyers to be persuasive, and Indian chiefs, I imagine, need skill in group leadership. Thus, the futures they foresee affect the relevance of students' study in communication.

In sum, all students have different pasts, presents, and futures which influence deeply how they perceive and react to their experiences in studying interpersonal communication. This characteristic puts this field of study in sharp contrast to virtually all others in the educational spectrum. This distinction must be prominant when evaluating objectives and a system of evaluation in this field.

Nevertheless, one might say that students' individualistic goals should be overlooked, that they should be forced, despite their pre-existing biases, to explore all principles and practices of human relations. After all, a survey approach is taken in the study of literature, about which students also bring some preferences to class. Here again, however, another distinctive characteristic of oral communication makes such an analogy inappropriate.

Choices among works of literature can be made at leisure while browsing in a library; a book may be picked up and put down at will; an idea about literature may be jotted down in class and then retrieved even years later when the need for it arises. Oral interaction, however, must be dealt with as it occurs; interpersonal crises cannot be initiated, interrupted, or terminated at will; what is learned must be employed in conversations spontaneously, as things happen, without the opportunity to rely on notes or other external sources of information.

These differences have direct implications. Knowledge or skills to be applied with such immediacy must be learned deeply, they must be thoroughly "internalized" in order to be brought to bear at the instant they are needed. This kind of learning demands complete commitment to the goals of the experience, a clear sense of their worth and meaning to oneself. In addition, this kind of learning should be conducted via experiences closely comparable to how it ultimately will be used, that is experientially, through actual in-and-out-of-class conversations.

To expect students to be thoroughly committed and involved in learning experiences of this kind that seem irrelevant to them is foolish. It gains nothing but forced compliance. Only a means whereby students can participate in tasks that are molded to their individual needs is suited to learning in interpersonal communication.

The need for individualization, commitment, and active involvement in learning in this field suggest that a fresh look at some common assumptions about its objectives, evaluation, and grading procedures is in order.

II

Currently, much attention is being given to the development of behavioral objectives. These are intended to eliminate subjectivity in grading. They allow one to evaluate behavior, knowledge, and/or attitudes with respect to fixed standards. In other words, the teacher asks, "How close does this student come to what is ideal, to achieving concrete objectives?" The answer to this question relies upon a set of absolute, objective, or categorical goals.[2]

The first step in developing such goals is to define the "ideal" communicator, what he does, what he knows, and what he believes. Does such a person exist? Most definitely not. No person always is effective in interpersonal relations. No one is consistently understood, persuasive, entertaining, helpful, etc. Every individual has specific skills which are somewhat effective in the situations he faces, and these situations are ones that only he faces.

The variables in any given situation include the personality, age, status, ethnic background, etc. of the persons involved, the kind of task being undertaken, the setting, the time available, and other considerations. These vary from incident to incident, and the patterns which recur vary according to the overall life situation of each individual.

Generalizations which may be applied to all possible interpersonal encounters necessarily are highly abstract. To recite them is meaningless. It is the ability to recognize their relevance at a particular moment and to apply them spontaneously that characterizes an effective communicator. The appropriateness of the application is crucial, and this varies from occasion to occasion.

Perhaps math problems always have single right answers, and some theorems apply to all related instances, but communication situations are too varied and complex to allow for an ideal against which individuals might be judged. Categorical behavioral, cognitive, or affective objectives cannot be validly used, therefore, as a basis for instruction or evaluation in an interpersonal communication course.

What then can one rely on to guide instruction if such goals are excluded? How can individual differences be accommodated in a single curriculum? I stated earlier that learning in this discipline should be experiential. Although students differ dramatically in what they need or want to learn, they share substantial common ground in how they go about learning. In other words, one might need an infinite number of statements to create a universally relevant set of content objectives for a course in interpersonal communication, but he would need only a few objectives to establish an experience-based curriculum. There are countless things a person might do or know about communicating, but there are a limited number of ways that he can learn more this process.

Consequently, I suggest employing experiential, instead of categorical, objectives. Such objectives define what a student will do in order to learn, not what that learning will produce. Perhaps the distinction can be clarified with an example. If a text is required in a course, a categorical or behavioral objective might be, "The student will be able to identify the ten major ideas in the text on a true-false test." An experiential goal for the same experience might be, "The student will read the text, identify the ideas most relevant to his current relationships, and write an informal paper on how he might apply them." The former objective assures the teacher that the student will learn what the teacher wants him to learn, the latter assures that the student will learn something that he himself deems relevant.[3]

The first step in planning an effective course in interpersonal communication, therefore, is to establish a set of experiential goals that are most likely to evoke personally meaningful student learning. To do so, one does not search the professional literature in this field to determine what the latest speculations are regarding what everyone should know. Instead, all the learning resources available in and out of the classroom are matched with possible ways of learning to create a series of experiences with optimal potential for student growth. Resources differ according to the materials, institution, and community available to the teacher, but some ways of learning are common to nearly all students.[4] Several are described briefly below:

1. Students can learn by observing others communicate. Albert Bandura[5] has shown that people learn many behavioral patterns from models, from watching others interact. In the classroom, students can observe others' talking, and outside they can be asked to visit and observe people in situations similar to those in which they would like to improve.

2. Students can learn by practicing the communication behaviors that interest them. Engaging in an activity can generate insights into what that activity involves. Role-playing in the classroom employs this principle. Students can actually carry out activities outside the classroom in which they would like to improve and then report what they learned from them.

3. Students can learn by receiving feedback from others about their communication behavior. Classroom observers can provide this, or it can be offered in a modified T-group[6] where uninhibited feedback is encouraged. Outside of class, students can be asked to interview trusted friends about how they are seen as communicators.

4. Students can learn from introspection, or reconsideration of past or imagined situations. Much can be gained by tying together and gleaning the meaning from one's past experiences--psychotherapists nearly all use this tool. Imagined or fantasized situations also yield clues to self-awareness.

5. Students can learn by manipulating what interests them creatively. When one draws a model or writes a story or a play about a communication situation, he can gain a clearer picture of what is occurring.

6. Students can learn by teaching someone else what he already knows, for in that process he is likely to grow to understand and use whatever he is teaching better himself.

7. Students can learn from secondary sources of information, i.e. reading articles, listening to lectures, interviewing experts, or in any other way benefitting from the experiences and ideas that other people have had.

These are alternative ways of learning which can be applied to interpersonal communication. This list is not all inclusive, other approaches could be added. Keeping these in mind, however, the teacher can begin charting his course for any given semester. The first step would be to identify a series of experiential goals to pursue. Many more are conceivable than can be accomplished in a single semester. The process of delimitation should follow laying out an overall set of acceptable alternatives. With these in mind, selection of those actually pursued can be shared by the students who will engage in them.

A sample set of some general experiential goals for a course in interpersonal communication might include a combination of some of the following:

1. Each student will use introspection to identify and report:

   a. his current outside relationships with which he is satisfied and those he wants to improve.

   b. recent situations in which he has been particularly pleased with the communication that occurred and ones that were particularly frustrating.

   c. how his relationships with others have changed over the years since early childhood.

   d. the kinds of communication challenges he expects to face in the years ahead.

   e. what he would like to learn in this course, what he is learning as he goes along, and a summary of what he has learned at the semester's end.

2. Each student will use observation to identify and report:

   a. behaviors of other students re: specific group dynamics variables (e.g. participation, influence, norms, etc.) as they engage in small group discussions.

   b. communication behaviors of people performing a job that he might someday have.

   c. communication behaviors of people in situations comparable to those in which he would like to improve.

3. Each student will practice and report what he learned from:

   a. participating in various kinds of dyads and group discussions in class.

   b. role-playing in class situations which he would like to learn how to handle better.

   c. trying to change his communication behavior in the out-of-school relationship(s) he wants to improve.

4. Each student will obtain feedback and report what he learned by:

   a. observing his own behavior in a videotaped group discussion.

   b. listening to observers' reports on his behavior in a classroom group discussion.

   c. interviewing a trusted friend about his view of the student's communication behavior in specific kinds of situations.

5. Each student will creatively:

   a. write a short story or play, with himself as the central character, depicting a situation in which he wishes to improve his communication ability.

   b. write a poem, do a drawing, or take some photographs that depict feelings experienced when communicating in a specific situation.

6. Each student will try teaching someone about interpersonal communication by:

   a. interviewing another student about a communication difficulty he is experiencing and trying to help him think it through.

b. creating a game or exercise which would help someone to learn an important skill in communication.

7. Each student will explore and report what he can learn from secondary sources by:

a. reading one book or several articles from a recommended bibliography.

b. interviewing someone whose communication ability he admires.

c. identifying a series of questions about communication that interest him and asking several people to answer them.

d. analyzing a scene from a fictional work or biography in which a scene occurs that is comparable to an experience in his life.

Once a set of these and perhaps other equally valuable alternatives have been laid out, it remains to decide how to present them to students and how to evaluate and grade their work.

III

Courses in speech ought to be universally enjoyed. After all, students share ideas of their choosing with classmates, and the teacher provides assistance with a clearly vital and potentially very satisfying act--communication. Yet, in practice, this venture consistently is marred by the anticipation of a letter or number of chilling impact.

The "grade" often influences the choice of a course by the student and the choice of content by the teacher long before the class begins. It affects what they give their attention to in the classroom, and in the teacher-student dialogue, the grade usually has the last word of the semester. In fact, its influence can linger long after the course content is forgotten.

My purpose is not to attack grading. It is accepted here as an unavoidable, if undesirable, reality to which one may adapt in more or less beneficial ways. I ~~hope to~~ propose an approach to evaluation, and subsequently to grading, which encourages, rather than frustrates, student learning.

The traditional means for evaluating ~~and grading~~ students is "comparative." Each individual's achievement is compared to others in his class or at his grade level, a determination is made of how his work compares with theirs, and praise or criticism and a grade are given on that basis.

I have already discussed in detail how inappropriate it is to generalize about or to compare students in regard to their interpersonal communication. An additional factor, peculiar to this subject area, makes such comparisons self-defeating. Whenever students are aware that comparisons are being made among them in an effort to determine suitable grades, a competetive system is set up. This becomes especially keen among those whose grades will influence their career plans. Competition in other subject classes may occasionally stimulate increased learning, but in an interpersonal communication course it is almost always destructive.

Here, more than in any other class, students must use one another for learning. The interaction and the feedback in the class must be as honest and as open as possible. Information about the communication behaviors of students and how they are perceived must flow freely among them for maximum learning to occur. Thus, cooperation is to be sought and competition discouraged. This demands that each student be evaluated and graded on what he alone does, regardless of the performance of others.

The mechanism I have used to meet this criterion is a "contract." Specific tasks, such as those mentioned in the sample experiential goals cited above, are suggested, and the students' evaluation and grade are

based on his performance of them. Nevertheless, every evaluation system must make distinctions based on a standard of some kind. I have already rejected the possibility of using fixed behavioral objectives as standards. The implication of the approach advocated here is that "experiential standards" be used.

A basic tenet of this approach is that whatever learning the student draws from the experiences he undertakes is okay. The only enforced restriction is that he indeed perform a basic set of potentially productive assignments. The contract, therefore, includes a grading system based on how much a student does, not on what he learns from his work. The more energy he invests in the course, the more he does, the more he gets out of it, and thus the higher his grade should be.

This implies a standard of quantity of experience, not quality. It suggests a way of measuring how much the student experiences. However, the student deserves evaluation, too, or feedback from the teacher on how well he has done based on the teacher's greater experience and knowledge. How can this be done without judging what is important for him to learn? Here, again, the criterion of experiencing should be paramount.

The teacher's evaluation should be based only on his estimate of how thoroughly the student made use of the experience he had. Did he draw the maximum number of inferences from his observations, practice, feedback, introspection, etc.? The teacher cannot judge the validity of what the student learned from them, but he can make statements about the process of learning. He can point out significant omissions, over-generalizations, misunderstandings, etc. He can raise questions about issues that seem to have been overlooked or over simplified. He can praise obviously painstaking effort and subtle insights. He can suggest further sources of information and activities.

Such an evaluation cannot be simplified into a letter or number grade. It can take either of two forms: a grade of "satisfactory" and identification of specific points that seem outstanding, or a grade of "unsatisfactory" and some questions or suggestions for additional work to making the experience a more productive one.

In sum, the procedure for evaluating students' work in interpersonal communication should be to comment upon how well the experience was used for learning and the procedure for grading should be based on how much effort was given to undertaking potentially worthwhile experiences. These assessments should be made on the basis of a "contract" including a variety of experiential tasks all likely to lead to learning relevant to each student's own communicative needs. His work, his evaluation, and his grade are to be based on what he did, regardless of what others in the class decide to do.

Such a system has several inherent advantages. The requirements for each grade are made clear at the start. ~~Vague teacher-centered standards are irrelevant~~. The student can approach his work knowing that the conclusions reached can be related to his own view of the world, they need not please the teacher. He need only decide how much energy he wishes to invest in the course. He sets his own goal, chooses the tasks most meaningful to him from the options available and carries them out thoroughly. If any are deemed inadequate, he ~~knows~~ learns how to improve and resubmit them.

Within this system three kinds of students who are often discouraged in speech classes can succeed: the "rebel" because he can chart his often a member of a minority group.
own course and reach his own destination, the "reticent" or "shy" student because he can do each task at his own level of readiness to interact (in fact, this technique was first developed in a course for students with speech-anxiety), and the 'hon-verbal" because test-taking ability is not at stake here, assignments

can be deemed "satisfactory" even if the results are reported briefly and in non-standard grammar, as long as they have been carried out fully through oral discourse.

IV

In my ten years of experience using contracts as the basis for evaluation and grading in interpersonal communication courses, several guidelines have emerged as most helpful. These are listed below, and each is followed by an example or application from my own experience.

1) The first step is to create a comprehensive list of learning experiences, all of which are relevant to the course you plan to teach.

Example: A sample list of (rather abstractly defined) experiences was provided above, more specific ones are detailed below.

2) Decide on a minimum set of experiences that would most likely cover the basic essentials of the course.

Example: In a college level course I have set the following as my minimum standards:

a. Regular attendance

b. Introspective essays on: "The relationships in my life to which I would like to apply what I learn this semester and how I would like to improve them," at the beginning of the course; "What have I learned so far that is most important to me, what do I hope to learn in the time remaining, what will I do to accomplish my goals?", mid-way in the course; and "What have I learned this semester that I can apply in my everyday life?", at the end.

c. Read the text and write informal statements on each chapter relating its ideas to your experiences in-and-out-of-class this semester.

d. Keep a weekly "log" in which you enter the most meaningful thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to human relations that have occurred to you that week in-and-out-of-class.

Students who complete all the above tasks are guaranteed a "C" for the course.

3) Describe additional assignments which can earn students higher grades. These can require more complex cognitive responses, more intensely personal responses, more creative responses, or expose the student to a wider range of learning resources.

Example: Some sample assignments which involve a variety of approaches to experiential learning are provided below:

a. It can be worthwhile to explore what "experts" have to say about issues in interpersonal communication that interest you. Find, or ask me to recommend, three discussions of any topic, and after reading them:

1. Cite the three sources.

2. Explain in what fundamental ways they all agree.

3. Point out how they differ.

4. Summarize the particular material from these sources that was most meaningful to you.

b. Pair up with another person in your group and make a date to "interview" one another. Every person is in a great many relationships at once. For example, at some time in his life a man may be a father to his child and a son to his father. Each is quite a different role, yet each is an important part of him. Encourage your partner to share with you, in depth, how he feels, what he thinks and does in his human relations while carrying out the roles below which apply:

child	friend	student	roommate
sibling	mate or date	parent	consumer
		employee	citizen

Write up as brief a summary of the person you interview as does him justice, and give it to him. Write a brief reaction to the summary written about you, and turn it in with the summary.

c. Pair up with a person in your group and share your answers to the questions below:

1. What were our first impressions of one another?

2. How have we seen one another as understanding listeners?

3. How have we seen one another as being open about our feelings and reactions?

4. How have we seen one another support attempts to be open and honest?

5. How have we seen one another as able to confront when conflict exists.

6. In what ways are each of us outstanding and poor in human relations? What should we do about our needs in this area?

7. What is the state of our relationship?

Write up as brief a summary of your dialogue as does it justice, and give it to your partner. Write a brief reaction to the summary you receive, and turn them in together.

d. Plan a specific instance in which you will use the concepts dealt with in this course in your everyday life. Do it and then evaluate your experience in the light of your objectives for this interaction.

1. Describe the person or group with whom or in which you would like to change your behavior.

2. Describe your habitual thoughts, feelings, or behaviors with the person or group.

3. Describe how you ideally would like to respond.

4. Describe what a realistic first step might be in growing toward this ideal.

5. Try it out in reality.

6. Evaluate how it went.

7. Make a plan for a next step.

e. We learn our modes of communicating largely from the people around us, i.e. via observation. Therefore, it might be useful to determine some way of observing people communicating in situations in which you are interested. You may find people doing something you admire in a classroom, where they live, at an informal gathering place, etc. Decide where you are most likely to see what you want. Try to observe at least two examples of this situation. Prepare a list of things to look for and a way to record this information while observing (or afterwards). Summarize the results of your observations.

f. An issue raised in this course may cause you some puzzlement. If so, it might be useful to discuss it with people you know. Select 3-5 people whose opinions you respect, and do the following:

1. List several questions you'd like answered by all of them. Ask them to write their answers to these questions, or ask them orally and summarize their answers yourself.

OR

2. Describe a problem situation or two involving this issue in

communication. Ask them how they would handle it, and summarize their answers.

3. If possible, ask them to give you feedback on your behavior related to this issue.

4. Look over what you obtained from the items above, and write a brief summary of what you learned through this investigation.

g. Select one work of fiction (novel, short story, play, film) in which there is a relationship between two people which reminds you of one in class or in your everyday life.

1. Describe the fictional relationship.

2. Describe the real relationship.

3. Explore how they are similar and what implications the fictional account has for the real relationship, and vice-versa, e.g.: How could the problems which exist in each be better handled?

4. Xerox and turn in a key scene in which the relationship is epitomized.

h. Do a creative project related to some aspect of this course. Two possible approaches are described below:

1. Many important messages about human behavior have been expressed via means other than language. If non-verbal expression is meaningful for you, you might want to represent in drawings, a dance, photographs, a collage, a sculpture, music or any other non-verbal medium some insight or feeling about human relations. Include a brief statement describing your intentions for this project.

2. Creative writing often can bring out and clarify many inner feelings and motivations. If you would like to try this, write a short story or play, possibly including yourself as the central character in which some issue related to this course is part of the situation. It might depict a situation very much like one you have experienced, or it might be an imaginary or ideal situation you would someday like to see occur.

i. Write an outline for how this course might be taught better than it is. Include specific details about the in-and-out-of-class procedures to be used and your rationale for each.

From assignments such as those suggested above, students can select one or two to undertake to obtain a "B" and an additional one or two for an "A". Or, some could be designated as only "B" assignments and others as "A" assignments. Only a few of the above options could be offered, thereby limiting student choice, or more could be devised and added to the list, thereby further expanding the available options. The overall objective that I keep in mind is to provide as many options as I can, thereby allowing for individual differences in learning needs and styles. All options, however, must be ones that almost inevitably result in ~~something being learned by~~ worthwhile learning for anyone who undertakes them conscientiously and must involve a comparable investment of time and energy. Underlying the effort to provide many options is the assumption that when faced with a choice among equally difficult tasks, the student will select the one that he will learn most from, and, therefore, pursue it wholeheartedly.

4) Despite all efforts to create enjoyable, clearly worthwhile experiences, some safeguards need to be built into the system to discourage procrastination and inadequate effort.

Example: Some of the restrictions I have found necessary are the following:

a. A means for "quality control" -- A statement, such as the one below, explains how this is communicated to the students:

"There will be one external check on the quality of your work. Every assignment will be read carefully by me and those required for a B or an A will be returned to you marked "satisfactory" or "unsatisfactory." If I feel it is unsatisfactory (which should be rarely) I will add a suggestion which is clear and concrete regarding some additional work needed to bring it up to par. You should have no trouble understanding and doing whatever is necessary to resubmit it in satisfactory form. Once you have completed satisfactory work for the grade you want, you will receive that grade with no further out-of-class work required."

b. Due-dates, scattered throughout the semester, are needed to prevent all the work from being put off until the end. For assignments such as these to be meaningful, they must be done in a reasonably unhurried

thoughtful way. When they are crowded in at the end of the semester, they can easily degenerate into mere busy-work.

I have found that enforcing such regulations as attendence requirements and due-dates for work to be unpleasant and difficult, I always seem to relent when excuses are presented. Therefore, I have devised a rather mechanical method of enforcement that allows for some flexibility, but also sets clear limits and penalties. This is presented to the students as follows:

"If you accumulate 10 penalty points you will be dropped one grade. Three points will be given for each absence and one point for every day an assignment is turned in late. (No exceptions to this rule will be made.)"

With these limitations, students then can receive the grade at the end of the semester which they desire, as long as they complete satisfactorily the work required for it (and do not accumulate too many penalty points).

5) The rationale behind providing alternate routes to fulfilling course requirements is twofold:

a. This discipline is more an "art" than a "science." Although there may be only one way to explain a phenomenon of mathematics or chemistry, many kinds of explanations can legitimately be applied to a communication experience. Thus, many approaches are beneficial for studying them.

b. A meta-goal of training in this discipline is to develop students' ability to carry on their learning on their own. Providing choices and allowing for decisions in their academic work is a necessary part of preparation for subsequent self-directed learning, i.e. people learn to be free, self-determining individuals by trying on that posture as students, not by being regimented in their behavior even at this stage.

Example: Besides allowing for choice-making among a series of teacher-devised approaches to learning, students can be invited to create their own. I usually add the statement below to most course contracts:

"In the above I have tried to suggest some assignments that best suit my knowledge about ways people learn most effectively to improve their communication ability. Although this represents the best plan that I can devise at this point for your learning, it is by no means rigid. At all times during the term two invitations are extended to you. First, feel free to discuss with me the rationale for whatever we do, and to question, challenge, or suggest alternatives for anything. Second, if your own interests or needs seem to point you toward some work that does not fit the plan described above, another design for learning to improve your communication ability may well be substituted as long as we both agree on its worth."

> Providing this final, open-ended option eliminates the mechanistic feeling at times created by some of the contract's structure, for it says that it all can be avoided if the student is willing to determine his own approach to learning. It is a testimonial to the intrinsic interest-level of the contract that this option is rarely chosen. It is consistent with the philosophy of this whole approach, however, to strongly encourage students to take advantage of this option and to devise activities particularly suited to them.

The contract plan, as suggested in this article fulfills the teacher's responsibility to think through the objectives and procedures of the course. It should not, however, eliminate the students' opportunity to do so. This option, allowing students to create their own learning plan, permits those individuals with special needs or interests to devise an approach ideally suited to them. In essence, this clause in the contract affirms that students can do <u>whatever</u> they believe is most worthwhile for them. The only alternative excluded is to do nothing at all, for only an <u>equivalent</u> set of assignments will be substituted for those in the contract.

V

In summary, I have advocated here an approach to setting and evaluating experiential objectives for instruction in interpersonal communication. Due to the uniqueness of the attitudes, ideas, and behavioral patterns which each student develops over the course of his lifetime, and consequently brings to classroom study of interpersonal communication, as well as the differentiation among the contexts in which each plans to use what he learns, uniform objectives for an entire class are inappropriate. Instead, individuals must set and pursue their own objectives. For learning to be applied usefully in the give-and-take of everyday discourse, it must be deeply internalized. This kind of learning cannot be passive. An active,

experiential approach to instruction is advised.

First, experiential goals must be established and activities related to each should be devised. These must be experienced without inhibitions created by the fear of being evaluated or graded. Since grading is an unavoidable reality in contemporary educational institutions, a system for grading that is individualized, experiential, and non-competetive was proposed--a "contract." Guidelines and suggestions for creating a contract were offered.

These have proved valuable to me and my students in the past. Every instructor, however, needs to devise a course contract that suits the material he is exploring, the students in his class, and his own beliefs about teaching and learning. It can take many versions and revisions to produce one that yields maximum enthusiasm and learning from one's students and that discriminates those who expend genuinely committed effort from those who do not. When such a contract is developed, however, it becomes an extraordinarily powerful tool for enriching the outcomes of teaching, particularly in interpersonal communication.

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2. An annotated bibliography of 89 studies generally debunking the objectivity of most grading systems is provided in: Kirschenbaum, Howard, Napier, Rodney, and Simon, Sidney. Wad-ja-get? The Grading Game in American Education (New York. Hart Publishing Co., 1971).

3. The concept of experiential objectives is discussed further in: Burns, Richard W., New Approaches to Behavioral Objectives (Dubuque, Iowa, 1972), pp. 83-5.

4. All the approaches described below and others less relevant to interpersonal communication are discussed in Joyce Bruce R. and Weil, Marsha, Models of Teaching (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1972)